PS 3545
.A754
V4
1915
Copy 1

Verses

Claude C. Washburn

Verses

Claude C. Washburn

PS 3545
.A754 V4
1915

©CLA411948

DEC 24 1915

TO MY MOTHER

A MORNING IN MAY

WAS out in the cool of the morning,
When the birds were beginning to sing;
Each calling to each
In the day newly born;
Each calling to each
In the fresh-scented morn,---
Calling: "Oh, it is spring! it is spring!"

And the dew-laden lilacs about me,
And the hum of an early bee's wing,
And the murmuring boughs
Of the new-leaving trees,
And the soft-stirring boughs,
Rustling low in the breeze,
Whispered: "Ah, it is spring! it is spring!"

AN OLD ATTIC

N through the gable window pours the sun
Upon the sloping walls and oaken beams,
Setting the dust awhirl in slanting streams;
And lighting up old cobwebs long since spun.

Without, there is the twittering of birds,
And sound of children's laughter in the street;
But here within it is so still the beat
Of my own heart seems to be throbbing words.

Relics of years long dead lie all around---
A harpsichord, a broken spinning-wheel,
Dilapidated boxes that conceal
Lavender-scented garments ribbon-bound.

It is a place half sorrowful, half sweet,
Where one may go at dusk and sit alone,
Soothing the heart-ache of the day just gone
With the dim memories of this old retreat.

IN THE MEADOW

H, the meadow-grass was high
When my love came tripping by,
Carolling;
And my love she saw me not,
As I stood there, flushing hot,
Worshipping!

Sunny hair and laughing eyes,
Wilful hair that ever flies,
Uncontrolled,---
Ah, my love was fair to see,
As she passed so close to me,
Overbold!

DEATH

DREAMED I saw Death standing by my bed.
His face was calm, though very pale and wan;
Still was he not, as often books have said,
A phantom horrible to look upon;
Yet, knowing who he was, I would have fled,
But could not do so, for my strength was gone.
Death gazed upon me with his mournful eyes,
And whispered, holding forth his hand: "Arise!"

Death's eyes were very tender, and his hair
Swept soft above his forehead, and it seemed
That suddenly all terror and despair
Were quite gone from me, till at last I dreamed
I cried out: "Death, ah, Death, but thou art fair!
"I love thee more than ever I esteemed
"My life!"--but, smiling sadly, Death replied:
"Nay, an thou wouldst, thou mayst not come. Abide!"

THE MASS

DIM was it in the nave; the pillared dusk,
Soft-perfumed with the measured rhythmic swing
Of golden censers, incense winnowing,
Was fragrant with the scent of myrrh and musk.

And from the mighty organ came a plaint,
So immemorially sad an air
The crimson twilight shuddered it to bear,
And the low-kneeling worshippers grew faint.

SAINT CATHERINE

LL in a golden haze there knelt a maid
Beneath a staine'd window whence, displayed
In sacred glory, good Saint Catherine
Looked down upon her as she knelt and prayed.

Calm was the maiden's face, save for the glow---
Like yellow lamp-light shining on the snow---
Her yellow tresses cast upon her cheek,
As never did Saint Catherine's, I trow.

Her eyes were brown like amber, and they shone
Wet-lashed and tender, while she knelt alone.
She knew not that I watched her as she prayed,
Nor had been half so fair if she had known.

MY LADY

MY lady woke at dead of night,
(Stark fear stood in my lady's eyes)
And her face in the shadow was ghastly white,
Like the pallid face of a wraith by night.
(But my lady could not rise.)

She could not rise, yet she came to me.
(Cold, ah cold, were her finger-tips!)
Her eyes were wide, but they could not see;
And I shook in the very soul of me.
(Chill were my lady's lips!)

SWEET JESSAMINE

ILACS, purple 'gainst the green
Of your dark leaves wet with dew,
Perfumed petals whose pink sheen
Ever shimmers with the dew,---
Ye are very fair, I ween:
But my love wears jessamine.

Apple-blossoms drifting in
Through the window of my room,
Apple-blossoms pink and thin,
Scenting rosy-faint my room,---
Ye are fair indeed, I ween:
But my love wears jessamine.

A DIRGE IN THE FOREST

IN the night the tree-tops shake and shake.
(Whose hand is this that stirs them so?)
All moaningly they quake and quake.
Oh, be still, be still, or my heart will break!
(Whose hand is this that stirs it so?)

None knows half so well as I!
It is the death-wind sweeping by.

THE STAR-NET

THE star-beams hung in a mist around you,
All in a faint star-mist they wound you,
Fragrant, and wistfully swaying, and pale,
And lavender-tinted, but, ah, so frail!---
I loved you fairly,
I loved you rarely,
Pressing my lips to the web that bound you.

And well I knew you could but be seen thus,
Thus, with the soft star-net between us.
Woe is me, for the star-veil melted;
In a fairy pool the star-beams pelted:
And yet more fleet
Were your fairy-feet,
For the great red eye of the day had seen us.

NIGHT SONG

HERE on the roses is dew,
There is star-tipped dew on the clover;
A whippoorwill calls from the yew
Over and over and over.

Fire-flies wheel by, weaving
Of the night a tapestry
So frail can you help believing
The fairy-folk must see?

Oh, the meadow is made for dances,
And over it breezes have strewn
All flowers that a fairy fancies,
Breathing softly: "Come soon! Come soon!

"For here on the roses is dew,
"There is star-tipped dew on the clover;
"A whippoorwill calls from the yew
"Over and over and over."

DREAMS

DOR of lilacs steals to me
From the bush at the window-sill:
And over my soul the dreams drift by,
Like clouds on a distant hill.

All flecked with amethyst and gold
They float on noiselessly:
But I believe, so frail they seem,
They are foam of a fairy sea.

With slow fantastic imagery
Forever they shift and change,
Like phantom shadows in the halls
Of some old sea-castle strange.

And once I would have held the dream
I cannot but love most.
Ah, now, although I watch alway,
The fairest dream is lost!

Odor of lilacs steals to me
From the bush at the window-sill;
And over my soul the dreams drift by,
Like clouds on a distant hill.

EMBERS

TIME was when many things seemed beautiful---
Night, and a rose, and sunbeams on the sea,
And the white clouds that drifted over me;
And now remain but two which are not dull,
Only these two---death and the memory
Which I evoke from this dead lock of hair;
Though I am told that God's face too is fair.

SONG

LL day I dwell with sorrow,
And though the day may be
Fair, yet the touch of sorrow
Clings close, like a memory.

All night I dream of roses,
And though the dream may be
Sad, yet the scent of roses
Drifts through, like a melody.

THE MOON WAS HID IN A MIST

THE moon was hid in a mist tonight,
Soft as sea-foam and so white!
The little stars danced over it,
And the little stars swang under it,
But the moon was hid in a mist,
A sleeping princess not yet kissed
Out of darkness into light;
And I said: "Where is he who shall keep the tryst?
"Sees he not that the moon is hid in a mist?
"Is there no red star who fain would fight
"For the moon his mistress in her plight?
"Oh, the moon is hid in a mist!"
Like the sound of the surf in a fairy shell,
Like the sound of some sweet enchanted bell,
I heard the stars laugh over me,
The little stars laugh down at me,
Though the moon was hid in a mist.
Save only one, but I could tell

He was too small to break the spell.
He was so small he could not quite
Walk, but crept up through the night,
Up and behind the mist.
But soon he crept back in gay flight,
With laughter of such soft delight,
So sweet and slender, well I wist
No star could laugh that way in fright.
And I said to myself: "Mayhap it is well,"
And I asked the star, but he would not tell:---
The moon was hid in a mist.

HOW CLOSE THE DEAD SLEEP

HOW close the dead sleep in this silent place!
Piercing the gloom
Of guardian oaks, the moon-beams drift and trace
Strange shifting characters across the face
Of tomb on tomb
Innumerable. Beneath there is no space
Unfilled---so close the dead sleep in this place.
Above them bloom
Pale flowers:---why should we grant them other grace?
Friends, aliens, foes, they are now but one race
Who need no room.
How close the dead sleep in this silent place!

ANNO MCMXIV

WAR, the red ogre, is loose upon the world.
He is free; his broken chains flaunt; with advancing strides,
Like fear, like a curse, like pestilence, he has hurled
Himself through the air, through the land, through the blue sea-tides.
Nought else abides.

His famished hands clutch, as they sweep, the bodies of men.
They are red, and his writhing mouth and his body are red.
A tempest of pain and hunger, hungry again,
He crushes their shrunken souls. (It is long since he fed.)
Their souls lie dead.

Pity and Christ and Love have fled from the earth.
Women's tears, hate, horror, insanity,
These and the Ogre War in his vast rebirth
Alone remain,---save just the far memory
Of Galilee.

TO THE SILENT

WIND of singing stirs the air;
Old weary words wake in new might;
And never, never, anywhere,
Was it more sweet to sing, or right.
But the others,
Our mute brothers,
Lying somewhere in the trenches day and night:---
Little time have they for song; they can but watch and fight.

"Flanders" and "France" are words of fire,
"Alsace" a banner flaunting high;
"Rheims" glows with a deep vengeful ire.
Can poets let such words slip by?
But, ah, brothers,
Our mute brothers,
Lying somewhere with your faces toward the sky:---
Nobler is your silence, though it last eternally.

TWO SICILIAN CITIES

I. TAORMINA

THE sky is a painted sky. The sunlight slips
So carefully through almond-blossoms. Pan,
A munching goat, smiles placidly at man.
Dramatically down, the high cliff dips,
To where, enchanted, loved by Attic ships,
Haunted by gods since ever gods began,
The sea, the sweet, the blue, the Ionian,
Kisses the shore with indolent white lips

Flowers on the walls, soft perfume in the air,
Maidens with jugs set on their sun-burnt hair,---
That is the village. Yonder your eyes meet
The line of Aetna flowing up the sky,
And turn back, dazed with beauty, to the street,
Where peasants' little painted carts go by.

II. MESSINA

THIS was the fairest town of Sicily;
But death came in the night and shattered all
The palaces. Still here and there the tall
Facades stand flanking the streets hollowly:
And through the vacant windows you may see
A tattered curtain flapping, or a small
Madonna brooding on a ruined wall.
Silence, decay, abandon, misery!

Nothing ends ever. All things re-begin,---
Life and delight and suffering and sin.
A brief half-mile away life grovels. There
They have built the new town on a rubbish heap;
Long lines of wooden huts, gaunt, ugly, bare.
I know not if to wonder or to weep.

FLOWERS IN FRANCE

REAMING of France, I mind me how
The poppies in the fields would dance,
Touching the green with scarlet. Now
There are no flowers left in France.

In the sweet fields no violet breathes.
There are no flowers, save, perchance,
The barren artificial wreaths
They lay upon the graves in France.

Copyrighted 1915
by
Claude C. Washburn

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 018 395 486 6